

The Women Who Ran CO Support Activities in Bristol

Women were prominent in running support for COs and their families. Many of these women had campaigned before the war for votes for women. At the outbreak of the war the suffrage movement split. Emmeline Pankhurst along with her daughter Christabel and others supported the war. Another daughter, [Sylvia Pankhurst](#), and others opposed it. These women became an important part of the anti-conscription movement, especially when COs began to be sent to prison.

Nationally, the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) campaigned against conscription and organised support for COs and [women were key players](#) as they were in the peace movement more generally. For example, [Caroline Marshall](#), [Violet Tillard](#) and [Lydia Smith](#) were key players. Bristol was no different - the secretary of the Bristol branch was Annie Chappell. Her name can be seen on [this membership card](#). Annie's husband was CO Bert Chappell.

In Bristol, the NCF was part of the Joint Advisory Committee for Conscientious Objectors which had offices in Rosemary Street, now under shops in Broadmead. The Committee brought together a range of religious, moral and political opponents of war and conscription. Mabel Tothill was the secretary. Annie Townley, whose husband was CO Ernest Townley, and Bertha Ayles, whose husband was CO Walter Ayles, were key members, along with Annie Chappell and Gertrude Giles. Annie Townley & Bertha Ayles were near-neighbours in Ashley Down. The Committee were in regular contact with COs and their families. Where necessary families received material support and children were given holidays.

Elizabeth Hutchinson, a Quaker from Redland, allowed men who were evading the military to stay at a house she owned in Winscombe. She was prosecuted and fined for doing this.

The Committee also published leaflets that were distributed in Bristol giving details about the treatment of COs. These survive in local archives. One of them is [What Every Bristol Man Should Know](#).

In 1920, Mabel Tothill became the first woman to sit on Bristol City Council.

See also the pdfs on this website relating to *Mabel Tothill*, *Annie Chappell*, *Annie Townley* and *Elizabeth Hutchinson* as well as the [Steps Against War Bedminster film](#).